

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Use criteria to assess the credibility of authors
- Analyze a source to determine its credibility

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

You will need photocopies for students of:

- **Student Lesson Summary**, p. 155
- **Teaching Model**, “Two Authors on the Topic of Cancer and Food,” p. 156
- **Practice Worksheets**, Levels A and B, pp. 157–158
- **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 159

Teach

1. **Author Credibility:** Introduce the lesson in these two ways, as follows.
 - Ask students which author they would trust more if they wanted to learn about life as a songwriter: a Grammy-winning songwriter or a songwriter who hasn't yet recorded any songs recorded. Ask them why. (*Students should prefer the award winner, citing experience, knowledge, credentials, authority, and/or recognition.*)
 - Point out that people are often told, “Don't believe everything you read.” Explain that being published—in print or on the Internet, is not the best criteria for **credibility**, or the quality of being trustworthy, believable. and authoritative. Explain that there are several criteria and questions that can help readers decide whether to trust what they read.
2. **Teaching Author Credibility:** Distribute the **Lesson Summary**, preview the **Academic Vocabulary**, and guide students through the **Here's How** steps. Stress the following points.
 - **Criteria:** Since **Step 2** uses both the terms *credibility* and *credentials*, you might explain that both words derive from the Latin *credere*, “to believe.” Students should see that *credibility* means “believability” and that *credential* means “evidence that the person can be believed.” Tell students that to be *credible* an author should be **knowledgeable, truthful, and unbiased**.
 - **Knowledge:** Point out that someone with personal experience or with good credentials (i.e., an advanced degree from a first-rate university) should be more knowledgeable about a given topic than someone without either of these things.
 - **Bias:** Warn students that bias can sometimes be hard to spot because opinions can be manipulated to look like facts and arguments can be based on faulty reasoning.
 - **Balance:** Point out that students should not automatically assume that any piece with a biased author should be discounted outright; the piece, rather, should be balanced by a piece with a neutral or opposite bias. By reading both pieces, students can move toward forming their own stance on an issue.
3. **Guided Practice:** Distribute the **Teaching Model**, “Two Authors on the Topic of Cancer and Food.” Help students to apply the **Here's How** steps to the two passages on the model.

AUTHOR'S CREDIBILITY, CONTINUED

- **Author's Name:** Call on volunteers to identify the author of the first piece (*Marilyn Gentry*) and the second piece (*Gina Kolata*).
- **Author's Credentials:** First, have students locate the information about the author at the end of each piece.
- **Knowledge:** Have volunteers identify the authors' credentials. (*Marilyn Gentry is the editor of the newsletter in which the passage appeared. The title of the newsletter indicates that it is published by an organization that links diet and cancer. Gina Kolata is a science reporter for a respected newspaper.*)
- **Bias:** Call on volunteers to identify in each passage direct statements and loaded words that reveal bias or fairness. (Sample: **Gentry: direct statement:** "I know that a bigger variety of produce in my meals means more protection from cancer"; **loaded words:** "beautiful, fresh autumn vegetables and fruits," "variety is dazzling"; **Kolata: direct statement:** "scientists say they really do not know whether dietary changes will make a difference." **loaded word:** "myth," "adamant," "evidence just is not there," "deceive")
- **Evaluating:** Have students discuss and defend their conclusions about the credibility of the two authors. (*Some students may feel that Kolata is unbiased while Gentry represents a particular viewpoint. Others may argue that even Kolata concedes that eating lots of fruits and vegetables "may work and probably will not hurt" and that the National Cancer Institute echoes Gentry's advice, so it may have some credibility.*)

QUICK CHECK. Ask students to comment on the author(s) of one or more of their textbooks. What can students find out, in the books themselves, about the author or authors' knowledge?

Practice and Apply

Activities involving author's credibility appear on pp. 157–158.

- Assign **Practice Worksheet A** to students who need more structured activities.
- Assign **Practice Worksheet B** to grade-level and above-level students.

Answer Key: Practice Worksheet A

1. *b*
2. *b*
3. *a*
4. *Statement 2; the NYT is a larger, more widely circulated publication than any newsletter.*
5. *Statement 2 refers to "scientists," while statement 1 refers to the author herself in "I know."*
6. *Statement 2; the author of statement one belongs to a special interest group.*

AUTHOR'S CREDIBILITY, CONTINUED

Sample Answers: Practice Worksheet B

1. *credential: someone with a background of knowledge about African American history*
2. *credential: someone who has a track record of underwater exploration*
3. *credential: someone who lived through the Depression*
4. *Because lobbyists accept money from the company or industry they represent, their statements are suspect. Therefore, Statement 2 is more credible.*

Assess and Reteach

Use these guidelines to determine if students need the **Reteaching Worksheet**.

- **Practice Worksheet A:** Students should answer correctly at least two of items 1–3, and should identify bias and balance in the correct paragraph for at least two of items 4–6.
- **Practice Worksheet B:** Students should give complete responses, close to the sample answers, for at least two of items 1–3; students should identify the biased author in item 4 and show that their answer is based on the credentials shown.

For students who need reteaching, review the **Lesson Summary**. Focus on the **Here's How** steps using items from **Practice Worksheet A, part A**. Then assign the **Reteaching Worksheet**, p. 159.

Answer Key: Reteaching Worksheet

1. *b;* 2. *a;* 3. *c;* 4. *c;* 5. *b;* 6. *a*